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The Early-Fall School in Semiotic Studies in Sozopol



Bankov and Leone at
Sozopol 2010

From 4 to 12 September 2010 the Southeast European Center for Semiotic Studies of the New Bulgarian University, in cooperation with CIRCE, the Interdisciplinary Centre for Research on Communication of the University of Torino, organized the 16th edition of the European Early-Fall School in Semiotics, under the title “Imagining and Understanding”.

The New Bulgarian University is one of the highest-ranked higher institutions in Bulgaria as well as in the whole South-Eastern Europe. Established and developed as a private institution after the end of the communist era, it has rapidly gained a national and international reputation based on the ability to satisfy the didactic, scholarly, and cultural needs of the new Bulgarian generations, on the capacity to reinvest material and symbolical resources in the improvement of facilities and service, and on a strong commitment to internationalization.

The Southeast European Center for Semiotic Studies is one of the pearls of the New Bulgarian University. Based on the semiotic and cultural impulse of Thomas A. Sebeok and fostered by the relentless efforts of a group of Bulgarian semioticians animated by Kristian Bankov, the Center in the last decade has established solid relations of academic cooperation with many centers of semiotic research both in Europe and elsewhere, organizing symposia, meetings, seminars, and publishing a semiotic journal as well as a series of books on semiotics (both original essays and Bulgarian translations from other languages).

One of the most successful initiatives of the Southeast European Center for Semiotic Studies of the New Bulgarian University is the Early Fall School in Semiotic Studies: since sixteen years ago, professors, researchers, and graduate and undergraduate students of semiotics from all over Europe as well as from other continents have convened in Bulgaria in order to celebrate the richness of approaches characterizing this discipline.

In the last years, the School has taken place in Sozopol, an enchanting town on the coast of the Black Sea where the New Bulgarian University maintains a summer facility. Here deep discussion about signs, signification, and communication often intertwines with excursions to local beaches or historical and artistic sites. The School usually takes place in the first half of September, where nightlife in Sozopol is enlivened by Apollonia, the most important art festival in Bulgaria.

Since 2009, the School is co-financed by the Italian Ministry of University and Research through a grant attributed to CIRCE, the research center on semiotics at the University of Torino led by Ugo Volli with the cooperation of Massimo Leone, Guido Ferraro, and other young lecturers, doctors, and PhD students in semiotics (for more information, see the report on [“Semiotics in Torino” in SemiotiX](#)).

The structure of the School has been perfected by Kristian Bankov and his staff throughout the years and has now reached a mature formula: graduate and undergraduate students in semiotics are selected by the participating institutions (various European universities with a strong interest in semiotic research) and attributed a grant that cover their return travel to Sozopol as well as room and board for their two weeks of stay in Bulgaria.

Days in Sozopol are both intense and various: although the composition of seminars has changed over the years, a balance has always been sought between introductory lessons for less advanced students of semiotics and research seminars for professional semioticians. Themes dealt with by the School have been various too, but they have usually been approached through a common semiotic attitude, focusing on the bridges between semiotics and society and, therefore, on the different paradigms of socio- semiotics (however conceived).

From this point of view, the School is both ecumenical and rigorous: banning prejudices against any expression of semiotics but demanding intellectual excellence from them all. Participants are given an opportunity to familiarize themselves with the most recent trends of semiotic research and to confront

their intellectual background with those of fellows participants coming from other semiotic traditions.

One of the central goals of the School is to promote the creation of an academic network among young European semioticians. This is the reason for which the properly academic program is usually sided by a leisure program including guided tours of Sozopol, artistic performances, a short-film contest, and sport (the famous annual soccer game “Bulgaria versus the rest of the world”).

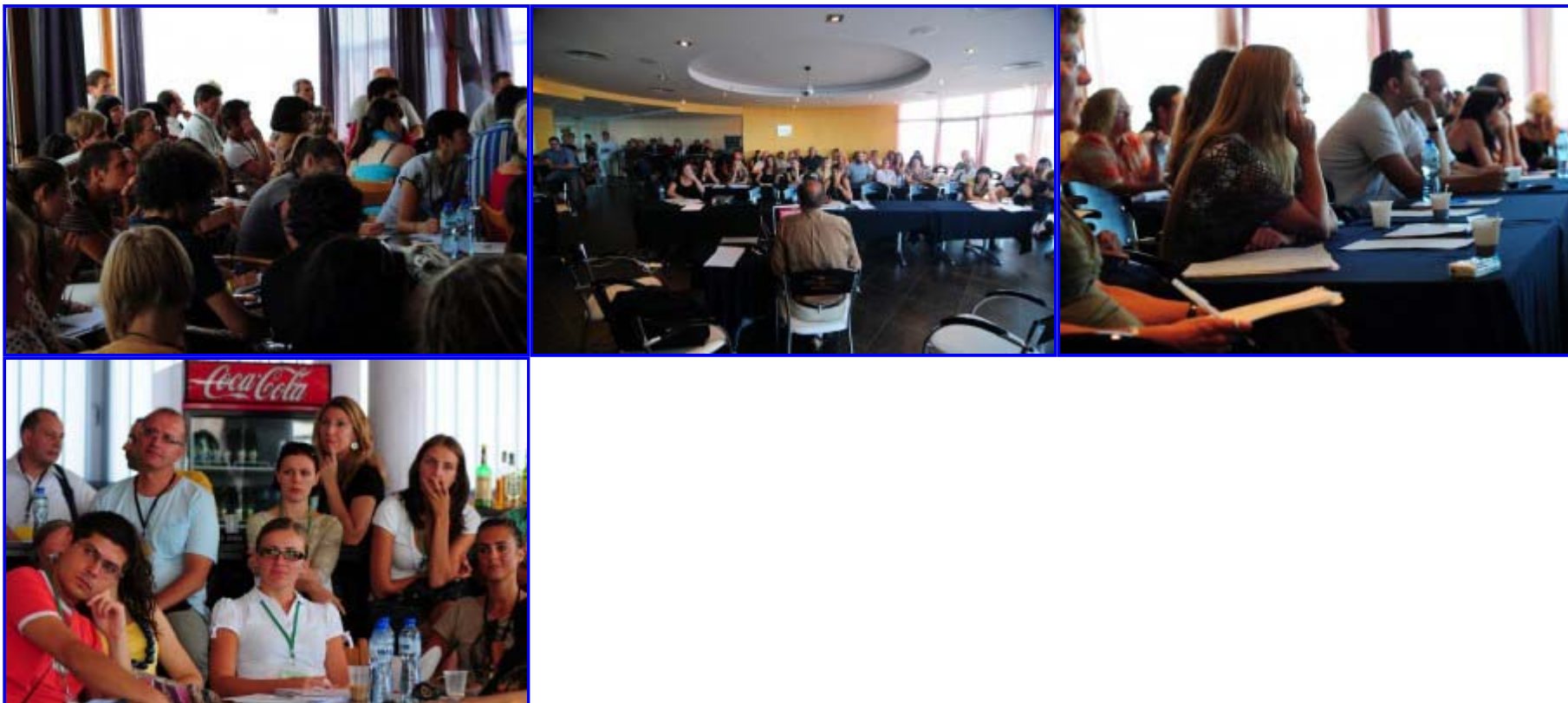
At the end of the school, students are invited to present a paper of their own and are required to pass a test, in order to acquire credits that can be validated by their home institutions. Research seminars commonly give rise to a publication: the proceedings of the 2009 edition of the School, for instance, were published as a monographic issue of *Lexia*, the International Journal of Semiotics of CIRCE (University of Torino).

The lingua franca of the School is English but it is not rare that, in the warm September nights on the Black Sea, often around a delicious Bulgarian meal, conversations on semiotics multiply in several other languages.

The 2010 edition of the School, devoted to the theme “Imagining and Understanding” and co-organized by the New Bulgarian University and the University of Torino, has been unfortunately characterized by some organizational problems mostly due to the international economic crisis. However, despite some regrettable cuts in the number of non-European semioticians attending the School as key-speakers, thanks to the joint efforts of the New Bulgarian University and the University of Torino the School was, overall, a success.

After an introductory address by Kristian Bankov and a prolusion on existential semiotics by Eero Tarasti the School benefited from the participation of semioticians from all over Europe; in chronological order: Antonio Santangelo, Anna Maria Lorusso, Maria Pia Pozzato, Lucio Spaziente, Cristina De Maria, Gregory Paschalidis, Michalis Kokonis, Georgi Gochev, Vladimir Marinov, Anita Kasabova, Dimiter Trendafilov, Göran Sonesson, Jordan Zlatev, Ivan Mladenov, Antoaneta Doncheva, Peter Dimitrov, Mony Almalech, Liza Boeva, Kristian Bankov, Vladimir Ignatov, Zdzisław Wąsik, Ülke Pärli, Borislav Gueorguiev, Anastasia Christodoulou, Kartsaka Eleni, Gregory Paschalidis, Evangelos Kourdis, Georg Kraev, Boyka Batchvarova, Veronika Azarova, Michalis Kokonis, Ivan Kasabov, Michail Chomakov, Maria Popova, Georg Kraev, Ernest Hess-Lüttich, Massimo Leone, Malcolm Evans, Marian St. Laurent, Svetlio Biliarski, Dimiter Trendafilov, Vladimir Ignatov, and Andreas Ventsel. The School also hosted the presentations of recent books by Peter Dimitrov and Massimo Leone.

For more information about the past editions of the School as well as about the 2011 edition please visit the [website](#).



About the author

Massimo Leone is Research Professor of Semiotics and Cultural Semiotics at the Department of Philosophy, University of Torino, Italy. He was visiting scholar at the CNRS in Paris, at the CSIC in Madrid, Fulbright Visiting Professor at the Graduate Theological Union, Berkeley, Endeavour Research Award Professor at the School of English, Communications, and Performance Studies of Monash University, Melbourne, and Faculty Research Grant Visiting Professor at the University of Toronto. His work focuses on the role of religion in modern and contemporary cultures. He has authored numerous papers, collections, and two monographs: *Religious Conversion and Identity — The Semiotic Analysis of Texts* (London and New York: Routledge, 2004) and *Saints and Signs — A Semiotic Reading of Conversion in Early Modern Catholicism* (Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2010). He is the editor of *Lexia*, the International Journal of Semiotics of CIRCE, the Interdisciplinary Centre for Research on Communication at the University of Torino, Italy.

Please see the following call for submissions: [Massimo Leone 2010 - Call for papers. The Authoriality of Religious Law](#)

Discussion

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Notices

CALL FOR PAPERS:

The International Journal for the Semiotics of Law (Berlin and New York: Springer) will be publishing a monographic issue in December 2011. *The Authoriality of Religious Law: A Semiotic Inquiry* will be edited by Massimo Leone, Department of Philosophy, University of Torino. [Read the call for submissions here.](#)

Request for Participation

The Department of Semiotics at Tartu University is conducting a research on the subject of success of the masters program (for foreign students) when a tuition fee is introduced. Participating in the research will take about 5 minutes of your time and would be very valued by the Department of Semiotics of

Tartu University. Please see details on their request [here](#).

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